

Woking Neighbourhood Watch column, July 2019

Not that long ago, when you went away on holiday, you just needed to make sure you cancelled the milk and papers, closed the windows and locked the doors.

There's a lot more to think about now if you want to stay safe.

For example, many of us are into the habit of online shopping. If this sounds like you, make sure you don't have parcels awaiting delivery while you're away. If you do, arrange with a neighbour to have them take the parcel in.

Email is another source of potential banana skins. Many of us are able to set an "out of office" message on our email. But setting up an automated reply that says, "We are all on holiday until 26th – I'll get back to you when we are home", is not a good idea.

Similarly, many of us are keen to post holiday snaps on social media. Posting pictures from your cruise ship says you are not at home and won't be for some time (even worse if the photo is from the airport on the way out). Instead, post your holiday snaps on social media when you get home.

On the subject of what you post on social media, on holiday or not, don't post photos from inside your home, or photos of new expensive items you've bought, including a car. Never have the registration number of your car in any photo. Try taking some photos on holiday with you that were taken from home to post during your holiday, thus giving the impression you are at home.

Before you go away, make sure any internal or external camera on your property is still recording. Retrieve what is on its memory to test it. When we install these small cameras we tend to forget about them and it can sometimes slip our mind that they've stopped recording long ago.

Always give close relatives or friends a key, so they can check your property whilst you are away (and perhaps also water the plants!). Get them to move something in the house that might indicate to a criminal that there is someone in, such as a pot plant.

If you have an external post box, this can fill up quickly in your absence. Ask the friend or relative to open the box regularly and empty it. If the letterbox is in the front door, ensure that piled-up post can't be easily seen from outside.

If you have to leave your car outside your house or in your front garden whilst away, make sure you hide the keys in the house somewhere so that any burglar will not be able to take the car as well.

Finally, don't forget to have a great time on holiday! By following these tips and using some basic common sense, you'll be able to relax in the knowledge that you have thought of everything.